## Abstract of the Disclosure

A picture analyzer detects coding difficulty information by analyzing the source picture data. A picture converter converts the format of the source picture data using spatial conversion or temporal conversion, or both. A coding unit then codes the converted picture data output from the picture converter. A preprocess controller controls the picture converter based on the coding difficulty information, selecting either spatial conversion or temporal conversion, or both. The resulting encoded picture features visually outstanding image quality in which block distortion is not conspicuous, and the coding unit avoids using a coarser than necessary quantization step even when the bit rate is low.